

Jodie Hollander's *Nocturne*, her second full collection following *My Dark Horses*, is lively, polished, technically sophisticated and often gripping in its presentation (“The grand piano that fell from the sky / did not make a sound as it crushed me”, *Dream#1*; “Now it’s every night I’m bursting / into flames”, *Notes on Burning*). The poems are easy to relate to and already widely praised for ‘brave’ confessional material. An up-to-date, often witty take on intensely personal poetry that doesn’t immediately appear solipsistic, this book bucks its own limitations. Angles of approach are varied (and often daring), involving fantasies (some comic, some darker), recalled dreams, extended metaphors and other techniques. The result is that a fairly relentless focus on the legacy of a difficult childhood doesn’t seem monolithic. Yet this theme is a fierce fulcrum that draws us in, while raising questions about what else is mainly (though not wholly) missing – war, poverty, oppression, preservation of the planet (and so on). Topics include: pathologically self-absorbed parents; waif children left to their own devices; loss of self-esteem; psychosomatic illness; an absent father who starts a new family; a mother who shares far too much adult pain; a sister whose promising career breaks down; a brother with a violent streak (“he’ll say, ‘an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth’, / as he grabs a steak knife and holds it to my face”, *My Baby Brother*). Of course, the family can be seen as a microcosm, and, beyond hanging out the laundry, these poems surface wide issues. The book involves light and shade and forward movement. The earlier poems reconstruct the child’s or young adult’s naked neediness, but include ‘looking in’ (sometimes through punishing shut windows) to contrasting modes of behaviour. Responsible, reciprocal, warm and loving relations come into focus in some poems, such as those about the poet’s stay in Nepal. Later poems bring on a fresh voice – a mature woman reflecting in lyrical mode, referencing ‘good’ relationships and support from living close to wild nature: “The truth is my winter has been long / and down where I live there are no flowers. / Yet I often think of them surviving / with long elegant stems and delicate heads”, *Glacier Lilies*. In focussing on gradual healing, as in *Geiger Key*, Hollander introduces themes around survival and reconciliation. The effect on the reader of this phase in the book is like a window cracked open – a ‘release’ that might seem to off-set serial tropes in *Nocturne* about attractive living spaces that are always the wrong place: “I pressed my giant face against the glass, / but right away your countenance darkened, / you yanked the shades, you bolted all the doors”, *Monstress*.